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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 LAGOS 000628

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STATE FOR AF/W  
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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [EPET](#) [CASC](#) [NI](#)  
SUBJECT: ONE RELUCTANT MILITANT SPOKESMAN SPEAKS

Classified By: Consul General Brian L. Browne for Reason 1.4 (D)

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SUMMARY  
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¶1. (C) In a recent meeting with the Consul General, former Bayelsa Information Minister Oronto Douglas downplayed his role as a spokesman for Niger Delta militants. Douglas is pessimistic the Delta commission recently established by President Obasanjo will yield viable solutions and has refused to participate. He claims President Obasanjo is not interested in a peaceful solution. Douglas described the Ijaw militants as a loose confederation of groups, each with separate, often overlapping interests. Because of perceived long-standing injustices by government and big oil, the militants were supported by an Ijaw populace sympathetic to their stated cause and illegal methods. Douglas asserted the only hope for a peaceful resolution of the crisis was meaningful negotiation between the GON and militants of the militants' demands for economic development coupled with the release of former Bayelsa Governor Alamieyeseigha and Ijaw leader Asari Dokubo. However, the President's third term ambitions, which the vast majority of Ijaws oppose, could muddy the waters and further diminish even that slim chance. End summary.

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DOUGLAS IS A PART-TIME SPOKESMAN  
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¶2. (C) Meeting with the Consul General during a recent visit to Lagos, Oronto Douglas, a prominent Ijaw activist and former Information Minister for former Bayelsa State Governor Diepreye Alamieyeseigha, described his nebulous role with the equally nebulous community of Ijaw militant groups. Douglas disavowed media reports describing him as a mediator between the Ijaw militants and the GON. While he has been in contact with the militants and has their trust, he acted as a mouthpiece for them on an ad-hoc, informal basis, Douglas maintained. Douglas stated the militants reached out to him because of his antecedents as a human rights and environmental activist in the Delta. Consequently, he provided advice and counsel but he stated he did not want to be perceived as a member of any of the militant groups. Such membership could ultimately prove bad for one's longevity or personal liberty, he cited.

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PRESIDENT OBASANJO'S "LATEST" COMMISSION IS INEFFECTIVE  
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¶3. (C) Douglas claimed no meaningful dialogue between the GON and the militants since the hostages were released in

late March. Douglas described the President's commission as too large and too Obasanjo-dominated to yield much good. Douglas said if the President really wanted action, he should have created a smaller working group, including representatives selected by the militants themselves, to develop a detailed plan of action from the bottom up. Instead, the President formed the commission with Ijaw participation no larger than other South-South groups although the Ijaws were the largest group and it was Ijaw militants who sparked the events that led to the formation of the commission. Calling the commission a distraction, Douglas noted several past commissions have addressed the Delta question but no presidential actions were ever taken. Most recently the Ogomudia Commission, headed by General Ogomudia and joined by many leading figures, called for increasing the oil revenue derivation to oil-producing states to 50%. The Ogomudia Commission also advocated against a military solution and recommended a program of economic development. However, President Obasanjo summarily dismissed the report. In fact, Obasanjo berated Ogomudia because of the policy recommendations in the report calling for more revenue and development in the Delta, Douglas contended. What could the new commission do that has not already been handled by the Ogomudia and other panels? Consequently, Douglas saw the current commission as dilatory and ultimately not created to achieve the goals for which ostensibly it was established.

14. (C) Douglas doubted the President's good faith, believing Obasanjo is not interested in helping the Delta and ultimately prefers a military solution.

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NO SIMPLE IJAW LEADERSHIP OR ORGANIZATION  
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15. (C) Douglas described an Ijaw movement with no defined hierarchy or structure, but one where there are many organizations and affiliations through which a person can pursue his own goals while also being seen as advancing collective Ijaw interests. Chief Edwin Clark is the strongest single Ijaw voice, but is not the undisputed supreme leader. He is more the first among equals. The militants give older Ijaw leaders such as Clark deference, but do not submit themselves to the authority of the traditional elders. Douglas stated there was a difference between the MEND "leaders" who were generally educated and located in cities like Warri and Port Harcourt and boys in the creeks who actually performed operations; however, this did not mask the fact that the two sub-groups communicated and cooperated with each other. Moreover, the militants were all home-grown. They had no external author or bankroller. Gaps between them merely reflect the difficulty of clandestine communication, and the differences that occur between the "brains" and the "brawn" of any organization, believed Douglas.

16. (C) Douglas asserted Ijaw communities are largely sympathetic to militant actions, and never condemned the taking of hostages. Referring to the second hostage-taking, Douglas claimed the militants wanted to release the hostages earlier but the community leader wanted them held longer, fearing government retaliation. He recalled the infamous Odi massacre of 1999, when an entire community was razed by military forces retaliating for the murders of twelve policemen by Delta youths. Douglas asserted without significant positive intervention, the MEND phenomena will grow, more groups will emerge, and the situation will become ever more dangerous for oil company expatriates.

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WHY THE ATTACKS?  
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17. (C) While money may have changed hands to resolve the recent hostage standoffs, Douglas dismissed monetary gain or protection of illegal bunkering activities (which largely benefit elite Nigerians) as the primary motivation for the unrest. Douglas claimed the primary motivations were the goals openly stated by MEND throughout the last four months: the release of jailed Ijaw leaders Alamieyeseigha and Dokubo Asari, and economic development in the Delta.

18. (C) Douglas conceded Alamieyeseigha had misappropriated large sums of money which could have otherwise benefited the Delta, but also stressed the peace he brought to Bayelsa State by doling out employment, contracts, and cash. None of the current governors of Bayelsa, Rivers, and Delta States - Goodluck Jonathan; Peter Odili, and James Ibori, respectively - have his level of influence with the militants. Bayelsa Governor Jonathan is further hamstrung by a mixed executive, with roughly one-third loyal to Jonathan, one-third with Obasanjo, and one-third loyal to Niger Delta Development Commission executive Timi Alaibe.

19. (C) Douglas saw potential flexibility in how the GON might address Alamieyeseigha and Asari. If, due to his physical health, Alamieyeseigha's trial is continually postponed, or if Asari's charges were reduced and he was granted bail and a "gentleman's" house arrest, the GON would preserve the illusion of control, while the militants could be placated. There is also the ongoing third term controversy. Douglas stated the militants stand squarely against the amendment allowing the President to "run" again and are reluctant to bolster his standing within Nigeria or internationally by negotiating a deal with him. The militants might resume their disruptive activity should Obasanjo get the third term.

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COMMENT  
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110. (C) Douglas painted a sober picture. In one corner he depicts shadowy but determined militants, supported by a sympathetic Ijaw nation. In the other corner stands an unyielding, stubborn President, historically unsympathetic to Delta indigenes and one who does not like to yield to pressure. The third figure between the two is the Obasanjo commission. Initially dismissed by all Ijaw leaders, including the militants, there is a glimmer of hope because Chief Clark has recently met President Obasanjo. Out of the meeting came an agreement that Ijaws would participate in the commission if Obasanjo increased Ijaw numbers so that they

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would have the largest contingent at the commission meetings. Hopefully, this procedural compromise will pave the way for more important substantive compromises. If so, there is a glimmer of hope. If not, it seems to be only a matter of time before we see the cycle of disruption repeat itself in the Delta. End comment.  
BROWNE